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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic
objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further
actions and initiatives**

Statement submitted by Fédération européenne des femmes actives au foyer, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The Beijing Platform for Action, agreed and reaffirmed by all States Members of the United Nations on several occasions over the past 17 years, laid out a comprehensive set of measures to address, inter alia, issues around the gendering of power and recognition of unpaid work. Yet violence against women and girls (the elimination and prevention of which is the primary theme of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women) remains a serious problem, and caregivers, especially in the context of HIV/AIDS (the review theme) are still unrecognized — as well as poorly supported — for the most part.

The two issues to be considered at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women are not entirely unrelated: the imbalance of power, whether social, cultural, economic or other, between men and women must be addressed if progress is to be made.

While the better sharing of unpaid caregiving between men and women would represent progress and there are suggestions in successive outcome documents of the Commission on the Status of Women for specific measures to underpin male participation in unpaid caregiving, until caregiving is properly recognized and supported, those who take up unpaid caregiving will remain more at risk of poverty, marginalization and exclusion, whatever their gender. The best incentive to encourage the uptake of unpaid caregiving is proper recognition and support. Current methods have not been particularly effective in encouraging men to take up unpaid work.

There was a time when it was almost universally possible to pay a person less for her work simply because she was a woman. Because of specific actions taken by legislators and Governments, in most countries the legal machinery exists for women to vindicate their economic right to equal pay for equal work (even if a significant gender pay gap does remain). Unfortunately, however, it is still possible in most countries to deny that unpaid care is work, simply because the caregiver is a mother (or a father or a grandmother or a child). This work is even termed “invisible” in many countries, since it is still not included in relevant national statistics or public policy development, and some families, communities and societies take it for granted. Although in every country families have certain responsibilities under the law towards their dependent relatives (especially children), there are few rights, and often fewer resources, associated with care work undertaken on behalf of relatives on an unpaid basis.

Importantly, this “invisible” sector provides the primary context for the next generation of children in the development of their values. Parents, especially, need to be empowered and facilitated to teach their children values of tolerance, non-violence and respect for both women and men. Teaching values to children is part of any given culture’s intangible heritage. On the other hand, violence is unfortunately an all-too-tangible negative phenomenon that needs to be combated at all levels, not only institutionally. This will be possible only by ensuring the appropriate support and resourcing of families, especially mothers.

Recommendations

Fédération européenne des femmes actives au foyer asks Member States to fulfil the obligations to which they have agreed under the Beijing Platform for

Action, especially strategic objective H.3, as well as the many other outcome documents of successive meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women. In the opinion of the organization, if Member States are serious about protecting women and girls and increasing their economic, social and cultural power, Member States will immediately implement the Beijing Platform for Action and recognize and support all women's work, both paid and unpaid.

Fédération européenne des femmes actives au foyer requests the Commission to consider endorsing the International Labour Organization's concept of a "social protection floor" and the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) tripartite approach to unpaid care work: recognition, reduction and redistribution. The concept of a "social protection floor" is about ensuring that it is impossible to fall below a certain standard of living. The existence of a social protection floor would act to mitigate the worst outcomes associated with exposure to poverty and would ensure a minimum decent standard of living for all. Meanwhile, the UNDP approach would directly address both certain aspects of poverty and the many holes in existing social welfare safety nets. This approach has the potential to empower women and improve their ability to combat poverty both in their families and in their communities. It could also improve their financial position and facilitate the provision of both paid and unpaid services within families and communities without resulting in women reducing their participation and income over their lifetimes, especially as they age, as well as encourage men's participation in care and related unpaid work.
